



# #TheStruggle IsReal

*Small Group Discussion Guide*  
**#THE STRUGGLE IS REAL**



## PREPARATION

### ■ STUDY

Spend the week studying Genesis 37, 39–50. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools to enhance your preparation.

### ■ DETERMINE

Which discussion points and study questions will work best for your group.

### ■ PRAY

Pray for our pastors and this week's message, the upcoming group time, your group members, and their openness to God's Word.

### ■ LANDING POINT

We can trust that God has a plan and purpose for difficult circumstances that bring confusion to our life.



## GROUP DISCUSSION

■ **CONFIDENTIALITY** | What's said in the group stays in the group.

■ **NO CROSS-TALK** | Be considerate of others as they share. Refrain from side conversations and texting during group time.

■ **NO FIXING** | We are not in the group to fix each other. Jesus does that part.

■ **SHARING** | Be sensitive to the amount of time you share. Don't talk too much or too little. Every person brings something valuable to the group.



## INTRODUCTION

*As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.*

# THE STRUGGLE TO UNDERSTAND

Life is unpredictable. Just when it seems to be going in one direction, it can easily take a sharp left turn. Life is full of mystery. Often it seems to have no rhyme or reason to it. Life is confusing. Things happen that make us wonder, “God, what are you doing here?”

As Christians, we struggle. Your struggle may be anxiety, fear of failure, a difficult relationship, or an addiction. The truth is, even the most seasoned Christian has moments when life seems like a tangled mess. We hope for real change, but sometimes wonder when or how that change will come.

God loves to bring about life change and do the impossible for us by His power. God speaks into your struggles, and He uses them for His greater purposes.

**Q:** *In what ways is life unpredictable, mysterious, or confusing for you right now?*

**Q:** *Why is it difficult to admit to struggling as a Christian?*



## LEARN

*Select 2-3 questions from this section to answer.*

# SOLD INTO SLAVERY

We're introduced to Joseph when he was just a teenager. Joseph's father, Jacob, loved him more than his other sons. His brothers saw how affectionate their father was toward Joseph, and they were filled with jealousy.

Like a lot of teenagers, Joseph was outspoken. He once told his brothers about a dream he had in which they were

all bringing in grain from the field and Joseph's grain stood taller than everyone's, as if his brothers' grain bowed before Joseph's. And he didn't stop there. "I had another dream where the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed to me."

Joseph's brothers were indignant. "Who do you think you are? Do you really think you'll rule over us?" Resentment toward Joseph grew in his brothers to the point that they conspired against him. First, they threw Joseph into an empty well and left him for dead. Then they decided to sell him to traders on their way to Egypt.

Q: *What causes jealousy and resentment? How do you avoid them?*

Q: *Imagine yourself in Joseph's situation. How would it make you feel to be betrayed by your own family?*

## GOD'S GREATER PURPOSES

Things were not looking up for Joseph. You can imagine he might have been confused about his circumstances. But we're told the Lord was with Joseph. He won favor with Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officers. In fact, Potiphar was so impressed that he made Joseph overseer of everything he had.

Just as things were turning around for him, Joseph encountered another round of misfortune. Potiphar's wife slandered Joseph when he refused to sleep with her, and Potiphar had Joseph thrown into prison, where he remained for two years before he was asked to interpret one of Pharaoh's dreams. Joseph warned Pharaoh that a seven-year famine was coming and to be prepared for it. Pharaoh believed him, and Joseph soon became the chief administrator in Egypt, second only to Pharaoh.

The famine led Joseph's brothers to Egypt to buy grain. There they meet Joseph, but they don't recognize him. It had been twenty years since they last saw him. To them, he was a powerful man worthy of respect. So they bowed before him.

Finally, Joseph revealed himself. At this point, Joseph could have taken vengeance on his brothers, but he responded differently. "What you did to me was evil, but God used it for good. Every event led me here to save so many lives." Then Joseph embraced his brothers and comforted them.



Select 2-3 questions from this section to answer.

## CHARACTER OVER COMFORT

What can we learn from Joseph's story? First, we see *God is more concerned with your character than your comfort*. How did God shape Joseph's character? Through suffering. God's plan for Joseph wasn't the smooth, straight path to success many of us imagine life to be. His ascent to power came through a series of God-ordained events that led him down a winding, difficult path. Why did God choose this path for Joseph? Because the winding, difficult path shapes you in ways that the straight, smooth path can't.

Does God have you on a winding, difficult path now? If so, you can respond like Joseph. You don't have to despair or complain. You can choose hope. You can act on the promise that God is with you in your suffering. Your suffering isn't pointless. God uses it for His greater purposes.

Q: *Think of someone who has responded to suffering well. What stood out to you in their response?*

Q: *Where do you see God shaping your character most right now?*

## BEHIND THE SCENES

We also learn that *God is always working behind the scenes*. We simply cannot understand the full extent of God's work in our lives. As much as we try, there will always be things that confuse us about life and God. "Why did my company decide to fire me when it downsized?" "Why didn't things work out in that relationship?" "Why did God take my child?"

When life gets confusing, we can look at God in one of two ways, with suspicion or trust. Suspicion doubts God. You question whether He really is good and does what's best for you. Trust submits to God. Trust says, "God, I don't understand what's happening right now, but You do. Nothing catches you by surprise. I'm leaning on you to work things out for my good and your glory."

**Q:** *In what ways is it freeing to realize there will always be mystery to God's work in your life?*

*Write a trust prayer for yourself like the one above.*



## LEAD

*Select 1 question from this section to ask your group.*

## A DAILY SURRENDER

God can use any event to bring about His greater purposes. We see it in Joseph's story, and we see it in the cross. Evil men conspired to have Jesus killed. They meant evil against Him, but God used it for the greatest good—our salvation. Jesus could have thwarted His enemies' plans. He could have saved Himself. Instead, He chose to surrender to the Father's greater purposes. He surrendered to death so we might live. Jesus calls you to take up your cross daily and follow Him with a heart that's totally surrendered to Him (Luke 9:23).

**Q:** *How does the gospel change the way you look at suffering?*

**Q:** *What would it look like for your community to suffer well together? What would be different about your community?*



## PRAY

Praise God for His love that meets you in failure, difficulty, fear, or whatever hardship you face. Thank Him for being with you in the suffering and it using it for your ultimate good and His glory. Ask Him to give you faith to trust Him in the confusion.



## FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

- Read Philippians 3:8–11 and reflect on what motivated Paul to suffer for Christ’s sake.
- Ask the group to share any stories or lessons learned where they see God at work in their lives.



## COMMENTARY

**EGYPT IN JOSEPH’S DAY** Joseph lived in Egypt at the height of Egypt’s power. The nation was unified under one ruler, and the nation’s influence was spreading in the region. There was also an ample supply of food due to the Nile River flooding.<sup>1</sup>

**GOD’S PROVIDENCE** “Providence” refers to “God’s benevolent and wise superintendence of His creation.” God is all-knowing and all-powerful over every aspect of His creation, whether important or trivial. He controls the rise and fall of nations (see Isaiah 40:21–26 and Jeremiah 18:1–6) and also feeds the birds of the air and dresses the lilies of the field (Matthew 6:25–34). God providentially works in the most minute details of your life to show His love and care.<sup>2</sup>

**A TYPE OF CHRIST** There are a number of connections between Joseph and Christ. First, Joseph was Jacob’s beloved son. He was betrayed by his brothers as Jesus was betrayed by His own. Joseph was tempted and didn’t sin. He is accused and condemned on false charges. Later, he ascends to the right hand of power in Egypt, and the people bow before him. His actions make him a savior of the people, and he forgives and restores his sinful brothers by allowing them to be citizens in his kingdom.<sup>3</sup>

### ENDNOTES:

1. Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 118.

2. Douglas Blount, “Providence,” ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1340–1341.

3. John Hendryx, “Joseph, a Type of Christ,” *Monergism*, September 28, 2017, <https://www.monergism.com/blog/joseph-type-christ> (accessed April 3, 2018).